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ABSTRACT

This paper presents findings of a study that examined the role principals play as schools institute democratic governance structures. During 2.5 years, data were collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis at six schools engaged in a shared decision-making (SDM) project. Findings suggest that for principals to foster SDM in their schools, they need to do more than step back and allow others to speak up. They must support and encourage SDM through creating opportunities for community participation. In addition, school context--the economic background of student populations, the faculty and student turnover rate, and the school/district relationship--affected the school's SDM efforts. It is recommended that school improvement be undertaken at multiple levels. Principals can make a difference in promoting SDM at their individual schools, but efforts at the larger system level are needed to mitigate educational inequalities across school sites. (LMI)

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The Role of the Principal in a Shared Decision-Making School: A Critical Perspective

by

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Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Atlanta 1993.

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The Role of the Principal in a Shared Decision-Making School: A Critical Perspective

Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Atlanta 1993

by Margaret Johnson and Linda Ledbetter

Abstract

Shared decision making has been widely promoted as a promising avenue of school reform. This study examined the role principals play as schools institute democratic governance structures. During two and a half years, data (interviews, observations, and documents) were collected at six schools engaged in a shared decision making (SDM) pilot project. The data were analyzed and interpreted using qualitative research methods.

Our findings suggest that for principals to foster SDM in their schools they need to do more than step back and allow others to speak up. They need to support and encourage SDM through creating opportunities for community members to participate in deliberations leading to decision making. We also found that the school context--including the economic backgrounds of the student populations served, the turnover rate of faculty and students, and the school's relationship with the district--affected the school's SDM efforts. We suggest that school improvement must be undertaken at multiple levels. Principals can make a difference in promoting SDM at their individual schools, but efforts are also needed by the larger system to mitigate educational inequalities across school sites.

The Role of the Principal in a Shared Decision Making School: A Critical Perspective

The 1980s witnessed the "most thorough and sustained effort to reform the American public school system in our history" (Murphy 1990, p. 49). Reform reports issued early in the decade both echoed and galvanized a widespread concern with the quality of public schools. A Nation at Risk appeared in 1983 and was followed by over two dozen major educational reports and more than 350 investigations conducted by state departments of education (Webb & Sherman, 1989). Although the reports were written from varied perspectives, they generally concurred with Goodlad (1984) that America's schools were in trouble and needed to be improved.

The reports focused national attention on education, and state agencies initiated guidelines and mandates intended for implementation by local districts and individual schools (Passow, 1988). Most of the initiatives in this "first wave" of reform demanded a strengthening of existing school standards (i.e., more standardized testing, more credits required for graduation, more coursework required of teachers) and attempted to tighten state control over localities through top-down directives (Murphy, 1990).

Against this current of centralization and regulation a "second wave" of school reform quickly appeared. "Second wave" reformers called for fundamental restructuring not only of individual schools but of educational systems. This call reflected the perception that

profound changes were necessary if schools were to improve and that state regulations were inadequate to effect such changes. Scholars and practitioners contended that the "first wave" reform measures failed to recognize the need for deeper structural reform in individual schools. In A Nation Prepared, the Carnegie Forum (1986) recommended "nothing less than a revolution in the role of the teacher and the management of schools" (p. 36). During the second half of the 1980s, most reformers agreed that restructuring the way schools were governed was a key to improving education (e.g., Bolin, 1989; Conley & Bacharach, 1990; Lieberman, 1988; Sirotnik & Clark, 1988).

New ways of governing schools require new ways of conceptualizing school leadership. Lieberman (1988) argued for the expansion of leadership teams in schools and for fundamental changes in the ways teachers are involved in leadership and decision making at the site level. David (1991) defined restructuring as "a new conception of leadership, hierarchy, and power relationships" (p. 15). Sirotnik (1989) asserted that leadership can come from many sources--administrators, teachers, parents, district staff--when principles of collaboration are taken seriously.

Shared decision making (SDM) in schools has been widely promoted as a means of formalizing this new conceptualization of leadership to bring about school improvement. Throughout the country individual schools and school districts are implementing plans to restructure the traditional hierarchical patterns of leadership and involve more members of the school community in educational decision making.

While most traditional literature on school leadership is based on a concept of direct leadership, there has been a shift in the way many scholars of school administration have considered school leadership in the past decade. In the late 1970s, researchers studying effective schools urged that principals provide "strong leadership" to schools. Strength of leadership at that time implied strong control over the diverse members of an organization. Ramirez, Webb, and Guthrie (1991) noted that educators are re-thinking the effective schools research. Research on teaching and school organization is yielding a more complex and extended understanding of the concept of leadership. This understanding requires that educators rethink issues of appropriate authority and power relationships within schools.

Sergiovanni (1989) suggested that we need to think less in terms of leadership strength and more in terms of leadership density, which he defined as the extent to which leadership roles are shared and leadership broadly exercised. Leadership can come from many sources, and the more leadership opportunities and leadership acts a school culture can nurture, the closer it comes to true school reform.

Rallis (1990) predicted that educational leadership will evolve dramatically over the next decade. She defined leadership as "an interactive, dynamic process drawing members of an organization together to build a culture within which they feel secure enough to articulate and pursue what they want to become" (p. 186). Within this definition leadership can refer to collective as well as individual

acts. The relationship between school leadership and school culture is dynamic and reciprocal.

Some educators have drawn on the work of critical theorists to discuss democratic leadership in schools (e.g., Angus, 1989; Bates, 1986; Foster, 1986; Smyth, 1989; Watkins, 1989). Foster (1986) described a critical model in which all members of the school community may at times be followers and at times be leaders. In such a model, leadership does not reside in roles or positions of authority but in leadership acts. An act of leadership "can spring from anywhere; it is not a quality that comes with an office or with a person. Rather, it derives from the context and ideas of individuals who influence each other" (p. 187). Foster (1986) saw open communication as essential to this broadening of influence and drew on the ideal speech situation described by Habermas (1979) to explain how democratic principles may be implemented by an organization. In Habermas's ideal, all those who have an interest in a problem have equal opportunity to put forth their honest arguments, and stakeholders make collective choices based on the force of the best argument.

Foster (1986) described leadership acts as "acts bounded in space and time...that enable others and allow them, in turn, to become enablers" (p. 187). A leadership act promotes "democratic and rational participation" in the life of the school (p. 187). Habermas's (1979) ideal speech situation elaborates the notion of democratic and rational participation. According to Habermas, the best decisions are reached when all those interested have equal opportunity to present their viewpoints freely. Under such ideal

circumstances the best argument will prevail. Acts of leadership bring more interested parties into decision making processes on issues facing a school (Foster, 1986).

Individual schools do not exist in a vacuum. They are nested within community, district, state, and national contexts. Kozol (1991) has provided a compelling description of the savage inequalities that characterize our schools nationwide. Foster claimed that leadership resides in the community. Kozol's work suggests that we need to think more broadly about just who we have included as members of our community.

In this study we looked at the implementation of SDM projects in six schools and focused on the role played by the principals. We explored the actions and attitudes of principals in schools undertaking democratic governance reform. As schools adopt new governance structures, they enter new territory. Altering the roles and relationships in schools is difficult and complex. What can principals do to foster this process? What influence does the context of the school have on the tasks faced by an SDM principal?

SDM in Redwood County[1]

Redwood County began an SDM pilot project in the fall of 1989. The district Superintendent and the president of the teachers' union formed an SDM Steering Committee composed of teachers, school-level administrators, district-level administrators, union officials, a member of a parents' group, and a member of the school board. The Steering Committee called for applications from the county's schools

[1]All names used in this study are pseudonyms.

and 42 schools applied. The Steering Committee selected 10 schools to begin SDM in the spring semester of the 1989-90 school year.

A team of university researchers was invited to conduct a formative evaluation of six of the pilot schools (two of the schools were high schools, two middle schools, and two elementary schools). The team made six visits to the schools over three school years (between February 1990 and May 1992) and conducted over 500 interviews with school community members. The researchers interviewed each principal at least five times. Additionally, researchers observed SDM activities and collected pertinent documents. The team wrote status reports for each school after the on-site visits and prepared end-of-the-year reports for each of the schools and for the district. This study is based on data collected by the research team. Qualitative research methods were used to analyze and interpret the data.

As the researchers monitored the implementation process in the six schools, we found that the role of the principal was crucial to the progress of democratic reform. In this study we posed 5 questions to guide our examination of the manner in which principals affected SDM at their schools:

1. What motivated the principals to apply to become an SDM school? What expectations did they have for the reform?
2. What visions did the principals have of SDM?
3. What critical events shaped their role in SDM at their schools?
4. How did they promote or inhibit the progress of SDM?
5. How did their school contexts affect their roles as SDM principals and the implementation of SDM at their schools?

Findings

Malen, Ogawa, and Kranz (1990) reviewed the literature on democratic reform projects and concluded that instituting SDM structures seldom leads to broadening participation in decision making. They argued that the traditional cultural norms in schools are so strong that those norms are not changed by the creation of SDM councils or committees. Two of the six schools we monitored in Redwood fit the pattern Malen, et al. described. SDM brought about little change in the decision making patterns at those schools. We describe those schools (one high school and one middle school) as "struggling" with SDM. The other four schools, however, were in the process of becoming SDM schools. Two of them had had some early difficulties but had succeeded in overcoming initial problems and were beginning to see the benefits of SDM. We note that these schools (both elementary schools) are "making progress" toward SDM. Stakeholders at two of the schools had established ways to involve many community members in deliberations leading to decision making. They had made changes in their educational programs, and we found evidence that school community members were relating to each other in new ways. We call these schools (one high school and one middle school) "restructuring." In the section that follows we use these categories to discuss our findings relative to the questions posed above.

The Schools and their Principals

Three of the six schools served affluent student populations, one was located in a working class neighborhood, and two schools were located in economically depressed inner city areas. All six principals were new or relatively new to their positions; none had been at the schools more than two years at the time the SDM project began.

Restructuring Schools. Friendship Middle School and Franklin High School both serve students from socio-economic backgrounds ranging from middle class to affluent. Friendship's principal, Ms. Murray had served one year when the school began its SDM project. Dr. Martin, principal of Franklin High, was new to his post the semester his school applied to be part of the SDM project.

Progressing Schools. Lakeland and Lewis are both elementary schools. Lakeland serves a population of over a thousand students. Over 80% of the students are minority and over 85% receive free or reduced lunch. The principal, Mr. Peters, had been at Lakeland for one year when the school began instituting SDM. Lewis Elementary School enrolls about 600 students from working and middle class backgrounds. About 20% are minority and about half receive free or reduced lunch. Ms. Prescott had been principal for two years when Lewis began its SDM project.

Struggling Schools. Clark Middle School serves a student population from middle class to affluent families. Its principal, Mr. Baker, was new to his job the year Clark began instituting SDM. Claybourne High School is located in a neighborhood populated by the working poor and the unemployed. About 85% of the student

population is minority. Mr. Brewster was also a new principal in his school as it began its SDM project.

Motivation: Why SDM?

In the restructuring schools both principals described their faculties as "excellent" and were motivated to become SDM schools by the benefit they saw in tapping the talents of their teachers. As her school began the project, Ms. Murray said that SDM would allow principals to take "advantage of the expertise that you have in the building...I've got an intelligent staff that wants to do things--we're already doing a lot of things to try and reach kids differently." Dr. Martin described his faculty as "a very mature group. They are intelligent; they are good at their craft." In May 1990, just a few months after the project had begun, Dr. Martin said, "I had faith in the teachers, and I think it is bearing out. I think they are serious about [SDM and are] doing a good job."

Dr. Martin also noted that he hoped SDM would help all members of the school community appreciate the parts played by the others. Ms. Murray saw SDM as a way to gain greater control over the county and state regulations that affected her school.

In the schools making progress toward SDM both principals saw SDM as a way for faculty and staff members to appreciate the job a principal is expected to do. Mr. Peters and Ms. Prescott both reported a lack of cohesion in their faculties and hoped that SDM might increase trust among the faculty members and between the faculty members and administrators. For Ms. Prescott this was a

particularly important concern. She sensed tension between herself and her faculty and saw SDM as a way to ease that tension. At Lakeland Mr. Peters was very concerned about low levels of student achievement and hoped that through SDM teachers might share ideas about raising student performance.

Neither of the principals in the schools struggling with SDM had been strong SDM advocates. Mr. Brewster saw as his main task raising the educational level of students at Claybourne High School. He reported that he agreed to the SDM project because an SDM advocate on the faculty convinced him that the project would lead to improvement in student achievement. He also noted that his administrative style involved delegating responsibilities, and that this style would be compatible with SDM.

Mr. Baker reported that Clark Middle School had long been characterized by teachers sharing in decision making. A group of veteran teachers had become accustomed to having influence in school-wide matters. The school had a reputation in the district for academic excellence, and Mr. Baker said he felt Clark was "expected" to become an SDM school.

Vision of SDM

Principals in the restructuring schools saw wide participation in decision making as central to SDM. Dr. Martin noted that at Franklin, "certain faculty members have had input over the years because they were vocal or respected or whatever, and certain parents...and certain students. [SDM] is trying to broaden that." He said that his

"intention is to have other people [become leaders] and this has been one thing we've seen--a lot of new leaders at the school." He recognized that in the first three years of the SDM project teachers had dominated the deliberations and stressed the importance of including parents, students, and noninstructional staff in the process. He saw his function as "trying to keep all the factions working together and cooperating, and getting everyone involved." Dr. Martin encouraged widespread participation in SDM at Franklin. SDM subcommittees (task forces) were open to all community members and he urged all interested parties to join them.

Ms. Martin saw SDM at Friendship Middle School in terms of collective empowerment. "Let's make the rules instead of having someone tell us what the rules are." She saw making a difference in student achievement as the goal of SDM at Friendship and believed that accomplishing that goal required bringing people together to work on solutions to problems. She saw the need to involve parents, noninstructional staff, and students in task forces and committee work so that each group might learn about and from the others.

In the schools making progress toward SDM the principals had visions of SDM that were more limited than those of the principals in the restructuring schools. Mr. Peters reported that he welcomed the opportunity to be an SDM school. "I have felt all along that my administrative style is one of involving teachers." He saw SDM as a faculty/administration alliance and did not envision much participation by other members of the school community. He noted that the clerical staff would have a representative on the SDM

Council but also stated that the representative would not be required to attend meetings "unless an issue comes up that is in their area." He expressed doubts that parents would want to be involved. Although he saw SDM as mainly involving faculty, he doubted that many teachers would be ready to take over much decision making early in the project. "You have to crawl before you can walk," he said.

Ms. Prescott stated that during her first two years at Lewis--before the SDM project began--she had adopted an assertive style to get the school on a productive course. She recognized that some faculty believed that she would never give up her power and said she "took that as a challenge." Ms. Prescott said that she envisioned SDM dealing with both the day to day work at the school and with long-term goals. Her personal vision for SDM, however, focused less on democratic governance and more on her relationship with her faculty: "I just want truly to get that trust developed."

Neither of the principals in the struggling schools expressed a clear vision of what SDM might look like in their schools. Mr. Brewster reported that he saw SDM as a way of achieving consensus among the faculty members. He said he wanted decisions reached to be ones "everybody can live with." He did not speak about the role SDM would play at Claybourne. Defining that role, he believed, was up to the SDM Council.

Mr. Baker said in an early interview that only "minor changes" would be necessary for Clark to become an SDM school. He felt the term "Shared Decision Making" was confusing and said he preferred

the term "participative management." At first he seemed to favor an SDM Council that would deal with everyday managerial concerns. Later, however, he formed a Leadership Group that had both advisory and decision making roles. Both SDM Council members and faculty outside the Council expressed confusion about the role the SDM Council should play in the school and the role of faculty and staff in the SDM process. Mr. Baker noted that he felt SDM should be restricted to school faculty and staff. He doubted the efficacy of allowing parents or students to see faculty members engaging in "so much bickering."

Critical Events

Critical incidents at both the restructuring schools involved principal/faculty relations and helped define the course SDM would take in the schools. At Friendship Ms. Murray had already instituted ways for teachers to work on school improvement issues before beginning the SDM project. When the SDM Council was created, its members were unsure of their function, but Ms. Murray believed they needed to resolve their identity problem on their own. When the Council defined its role narrowly as a group concerned with "housekeeping" matters and refused to endorse a waiver Ms. Murray had supported, she realized the need for working with the SDM Council and coordinating the work of the different school committees. She got the various groups together and worked with them to merge the functions of some committees and develop an overall plan for school governance. As one member explained, the plan called for the Council to take "a visionary approach" to reforming the school.

During the first months of SDM at Franklin High, Dr. Martin sought to have the SDM Council enact a new scheduling scheme. Members of the Council rejected the scheme because they feared that the school administrators might try to use SDM to put through their "pet" programs. Solutions to school problems, one Council member said, "should come from us." After this incident the proposals put forth by any person in the school community were equally subjected to the scrutiny of the Council members and their constituents.

At both schools making progress toward SDM critical events occurred that resulted in uniting members of the school communities. In both schools the status reports written by members of the university research team helped people realize the extent to which building trust was an important issue for them. At Lakeland Council members discussed the report and concluded that they needed training to bring community members together. They wrote a grant and, working with Mr. Peters, planned an all day set of activities led by facilitators to get the SDM process at Lakeland moving. Faculty and staff met in a local park away from the campus. Participants described "an excellent day." The event took place early in 1992 and members of the school community saw it as a turning point.

At Lewis a critical event also united the community. An after school dinner meeting attended by all faculty and staff was held in the spring of 1991 to finalize the 91-92 SDM plan. Participants, however, wanted to talk about governance issues and the need for communication and trust. A consultant hired to lead the session tried to maintain attention on the official agenda. Ms. Prescott

asserted control and kept the focus on issues the faculty and staff wanted to address. Governance issues were settled, communication was enhanced, and the SDM Council began to discuss restructuring the school to benefit children.

At the two schools struggling with SDM no events occurred during the years of this study that helped stakeholders at Clark or Claybourne define SDM at their schools. By May 1992 their SDM Councils had accomplished little and few community members not on the Councils were involved in SDM activities.

Actions that Promoted and Inhibited SDM

In the restructuring schools both principals worked energetically to encourage the SDM process. Dr. Martin promoted SDM at Franklin in a number of ways. He acquired grant funds to buy time for teachers to meet before and after school and on weekends. He arranged for SDM training (provided by a local industry and later by the county) for any community members who wished to participate. Dr. Martin attended to the views of those who disagreed with decisions made by the SDM Council. When the Council adopted an extended period day, he recognized that some teachers felt they did not know how to handle longer classes. He arranged for inservice sessions and for faculty to visit schools that had extended period schedules in place. "We want the dialogue to continue," he said.

Ms. Murray also acquired funds to support SDM efforts. She provided support for faculty initiatives and suggestions by the

faculty for staff development. Additionally, after the SDM Council had been re-defined as a vehicle for school reform, she worked to help that body become a well functioning group. Under her initiative "we spent a lot of time on team building."

The principals at the schools making progress toward SDM needed to establish faculty/principal trust before they could actively support the process. Ms. Prescott's leadership was an SDM issue at Lewis. Initially she behaved in ways that hurt feelings and discouraged trust. She failed to create a safe arena for opposing viewpoints to be heard and when the SDM Council made decisions with which she disagreed, she overturned them. By the spring of 1991, however, Ms. Prescott had begun to resolve the issues of communication and trust that had caused tensions. She had opened up power issues for discussion and learned to "listen better, to take concerns seriously."

Mr. Peters believed that his leadership style was compatible with SDM and teachers interviewed in February 1990 agreed that he often sought faculty opinions and shared decisions. After the formation of the SDM Council, however, Mr. Peters was unsure about what his role should be. He spoke about perceiving the SDM Council as ineffectual, "all talk and no action." He did not see any alternatives, however, between not interfering with the Council's work and taking over the Council's work. It was not until the "day in the park" that Mr. Peters began to see that his faculty could take initiative and move forward with SDM. After that he began to talk about the value of providing people with training and time. As this

study came to an end Mr. Peters was beginning to gather resources for his faculty and staff to help them in their SDM efforts.

Both principals in the schools struggling with SDM described themselves as "open door" principals. Both said that their leadership style involved delegating authority to others. Both were willing to have their SDM Councils take on responsibilities. Neither of them, however, provided the support or encouragement their faculties needed to actively share in decision making. Mr. Brewster described his role as an SDM principal: "I'm just one of the parts.... I think it's very important that the teachers feel that this is their program, so I haven't been as active as I would have [liked to have been]."

Mr. Baker saw himself as a member of the SDM Council, "just like anyone else." He believed that the Council should take responsibility for furthering SDM. He did not see himself as an SDM advocate. He did not see encouraging widespread participation in SDM as part of his role.

School and County Context

At both Friendship and Franklin there were elements in the school culture that supported SDM. Both schools served middle class/affluent families and enjoyed the support of their parent communities. Teachers at Friendship and Franklin expressed confidence in themselves and their colleagues. Franklin's teachers said they worked in a "can-do" school. Friendship's teachers described each other as willing to share and open to change.

Although both schools exhibited the teacher isolation typical of schools, that isolation was broken down through SDM work.

The schools making progress toward SDM served student populations different from those described above and different from each other. Lewis Elementary School is located in a working class area. About half the students receive free or reduced lunch. The neighborhood is stable, and the community supports the school. Lakeland, in contrast, is located in an inner-city neighborhood characterized by poverty and high mobility. The physical plant is considered by faculty and administrators to be unequal to the current enrollment. Classes are crowded and there is little space for physical activity. Both student and teacher turnover rates are high.

The contrast between the populations served by the two schools struggling with SDM is striking. Clark students come from middle class or affluent families. The Clark campus has been recently renovated; it is pleasant in appearance and adequate for its population. Many of Claybourne's students come from families living in or near poverty. Teachers at Claybourne consistently mention the disrepair of the physical plant as an important school problem. Security is also considered a problem at Claybourne. The drop out rate is high. Although most teachers believe their school's reputation for violence and crime is exaggerated, they acknowledge that some Claybourne students are increasingly difficult to manage.

District and state regulation was seen by the principals in the restructuring schools as a factor restricting the progress of SDM. Dr. Martin noted that "no matter what we decide to do, there's a lot of restraints up above us." He said that although he felt Franklin was achieving SDM at the school level, there was little sharing in the decision making that took place at the district and state levels: "It's like I'm in two different worlds." Ms. Murray also saw the district context as a restriction. "We need to not have to constantly worry about...whether or not what you are doing is going to be allowed." Both Dr. Martin and Ms. Murray were skillful at "working the system" at the district and state levels, but both resented the need to do so.

Teachers and administrators at both Lewis and Lakeland believed that the district needed to give greater support to the SDM project. Mr. Peters believed that the rhetoric of the district on SDM did not match the actions of district administrators. He expressed his frustration at what he saw as the district's lack of support and envisioned no way to combat district interference. "That's insurmountable," he said, "I can't change that."

Claybourne and Clark had contrasting relationships with the district. Mr. Brewster said that he felt his school was one of the last on the list for the district to attend to. His pleas for repairs to the physical plant were the main front on which his battles with the district were waged. Clark on the other hand had a friendly relationship with the district. Mr. Baker was the only principal who did not have negative comments to make about district policies or procedures.

Discussion

Foster's (1986) concept of a leadership act as an act promoting democratic and rational participation in decision making is helpful to understanding the role of a principal in an SDM school. In Foster's critical model of school leadership, any member of a school community may perform acts of leadership. The findings from Redwood County suggest that--for SDM to succeed--principals must work actively to promote democratic and rational participation of all community members in the life of the school.

How does a principal provide this active support? The experiences of these six principals suggest that there are two parts to the SDM principal's role. Principals must first step back to allow others to speak up. They must then work to enable others; they must ensure that members of the school community have many opportunities to engage in deliberations leading to decision making.

Stepping Back

Ms. Murray saw that for SDM to succeed at her school, she would have to allow others to engage in leadership acts.

> One of the things I'm going to have to do more of is sit back...And I've got a group of people who...are already doing a lot of the leading. And I think that trying not to force where the project goes and allowing other people to take the leadership role is probably my biggest task.

The act of stepping back did not come easily to all principals. Ms. Prescott noted that she had an "assertive" personality. It was not

until she and her faculty and staff spoke openly about the clash between the spirit of SDM and her behavior as principal that Lewis Elementary School was able to move forward with its SDM project.

All six principals in this study realized the need to allow SDM to happen in their schools. Dr. Martin spoke with pride about "not being anybody leading the way" so that others at Franklin could become leaders of the SDM project. Mr. Peters spoke about giving people "permission...to enter into places and arenas that traditionally have not been theirs." Mr. Baker said he saw his role in the SDM project as "step[ping] back a bit." Mr. Brewster reported his willingness "to give up some of the powers and freedoms I have."

Enabling Others

Although SDM requires that principals step back to allow other community members to engage in leadership acts, stepping back alone is not enough. Mr. Peters noted that he had "taken a back seat, hoping [the teachers] would pick up the reins and start moving ahead--and perhaps I've gone too far back." How should an SDM principal provide the support that is needed so that others can pick up those reins? Mr. Peters struggled with that issue. He said that he worried about letting his teachers "go too far when they weren't ready." Part of the job of being a principal in an SDM school seems to be helping teachers--and other community members--become ready to take on decision-making roles.

At the schools still struggling with SDM after two and a half years of implementing the project the principals described their role more in terms of what they did not do rather than in terms of what

they did do. At Claybourne High School Mr. Brewster saw his role SDM strictly in terms of stepping back. "The principal," he said, "can't make [SDM] work, and really the principal [shouldn't] be responsible for making it work. This is something that, if it was going to work, it had to be made to work by the teachers." At Clark Mr. Baker also wanted the teachers to take responsibility for SDM. Although some Clark teachers hoped he would become an advocate of SDM and work to help the reform succeed, he believed that the SDM success should rest with the members of the SDM Council.

At the schools making progress toward SDM the principals had begun to provide support for their faculties and staffs. Once Ms. Prescott had been able to step back and re[illegible]sh control to others, she was able to support the SDM process at [illegible]. At Lewis the principal and the faculty needed to develo[illegible]utual trust before they could work together on school improvement. Mr. Peters had indicated in many of his interviews that he had limited faith in his faculty. He questioned whether they could function as decision makers. After the "day in the park" he began to see the possibilities in building the capacity for decision making among his faculty members.

At the two restructuring schools the SDM project led to program changes, changes in decision making patterns, and changes in the ways people in those schools related to each other. In both schools the principals were seen as strong supporters of democratic school governance. They defined SDM broadly and encouraged all community members to participate in SDM activities. The principals consistently demonstrated their respect for members of their school

communities and worked to provide many opportunities for people to share their knowledge and expertise with each other. They acquired funds, bought meeting time, and arranged for training. Although both principals built faculty/principal trust through their SDM efforts, building that trust was not a goal of SDM but a result. Both Dr. Martin and Ms. Murray saw their community members as capable and saw SDM as a means of applying that capability to improving their schools.

The Importance of School Context

The schools in this study that had actually begun restructuring as a result of their SDM project had a number of advantages at the time they began their SDM efforts. Both schools served middle class to affluent school populations and had active, supportive parent groups. Both had pleasant, adequate physical facilities. Both had faculties described by the principals as "excellent," "sophisticated," and "intelligent." Turnover rates for faculty and students were low. Expectations for faculty and students were high.

These conditions certainly facilitated the success of the SDM projects in the schools but they did not guarantee that success. Clark Middle School enjoyed similar conditions and yet--after two and a half years in the project--Clark was still struggling with SDM. The project had done little to increase participation in decision making and had made no appreciable difference in the life of the school.

In two of the schools, Lakeland Elementary and Claybourne High School, conditions at the schools did not facilitate the implementation of SDM. Many of the children in both schools were

living in poverty. Both schools had large proportions of students older than the typical age for students in their grades. Faculty and student turnover rates were high, and expectations for faculty and students were low. Mr. Brewster claimed that the number one weakness of Claybourne was the attitude of the faculty toward student achievement. "What's expected from students, from the administration on down, is very low...Expectations have to be much greater." Both Claybourne and Lakeland had physical plants that were overcrowded and in disrepair. The principals in these schools faced conditions unknown to the principals in schools serving more affluent student populations.

The findings from this study confirm the crucial role principals play in building the capacity of community members through enabling them to participate in SDM activities. However, there are inequities in our educational systems that SDM alone cannot make disappear. Jonathan Kozol in a recent interview argued that when we are speaking of restructuring, "the fact is we're...speaking of governance rather than education. It may well be that changes in governance will change nothing but governance. Restructured destitution remains destitution....It is a simple matter of humanity to use our limited resources in the places where they are needed most" (Hayes, 1992, p. 337).

Certainly we should continue to support democratic governance reform in all schools. We should encourage principals to do more than step back and urge them to actively enable the members of their school communities to participate in deliberations leading to

decision making. The experiences of the six schools in Redwood County, however, suggest that more needs to be done.

The acts of stepping back and enabling others need to be taken to higher levels in the educational system. All six principals in Redwood felt strongly that SDM must extend to district and state educational bureaucracies. Administrators at the higher levels of the bureaucratic hierarchies need to step back from exercising domination and regulation and instead offer active support to individual school in their efforts to improve the education of their students. The inequities across schools cannot be diminished only by efforts of principals at individual school sites. District and state officials must see that limited resources are distributed according to need.

We are not suggesting that principals wait for districts and states to provide their schools with a level playing field before they begin instituting democratic school reform. We agree with Rivzi (1989) who argued that schools must not wait for ideal conditions to attempt change.

> The structural changes required to facilitate extensive democracy in schools are considerable, and they vary from context to context. Because the capacity of schools to bring about change is limited by broader administrative, social and economic constraints, it might be tempting to suggest that unless broader administrative, social, and economic conditions change, schools cannot proceed with democratic reforms. But such a conclusion is self-defeating, because larger changes will not come about unless we first initiate small-scale changes on every possible front (p. 231).

We suggest that attempts to bring about school improvement need to be considered on multiple layers. Our findings indicate that the actions and attitudes of the principal are important factors for instituting democratic reform at individual school sites. The problems besetting our schools, however, are rooted not only in conditions that exist inside schools but also in the inequities that exist across school sites. School stakeholders cannot and should not be expected to take sole responsibility for school improvement. Foster(1986) argued that in a democratic society leadership resides in the community. Those who engage in leadership acts promote the democratic and rational participation in community decision making. For SDM to make a difference in our schools, we need to work diligently at our school sites, but we must also greatly expand our notion of who we consider to be members of our community.

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